



# McDougall's Good Stories for Children



## Bunks' Strange Experience in the Kingdom of Peter the Riddle-Master

WHEN I first heard of a Hierophant I thought it was something like an elephant, but Henry Dallam told me it was a very different thing. Henry is a boy who has had a most wonderful adventure, although so very young, and as he is the only one I know who ever saw a Hierophant, I must take his word for it. The boys have nicknamed Henry Dallam "Bunks," and, although I never could discover the reason, I call him "Bunks" also. He says the Hierophant is called the Filled Hierophant generally, because it has around its neck a peculiar sort of fringe made of long feelers, like the arms of an octopus, and with these it grabs its prey, usually small boys who are wandering in the forest late at night, and then tosses them into its capacious mouth. Others call it the Bald Hierophant, because its head is that way. Its distinguishing characteristic is its enormous appetite, and the peculiarity of this appetite is that anything is welcome, from tin cans, door-mats or glass bottles to beefsteak, goose or small boy. It will eat grass, wood, coal or anything else that is laid before it, and seems just as pleased; but as a matter of fact, a nice fat boy or girl, raw, is preferred. When it is pleased it purrs like a cat, and usually this sound can be heard afar off when it is going to get something to eat that it likes. Therefore people are warned in time to escape, for you may imagine no one would like to meet the Hierophant at any time. Perhaps you may wonder how Bunks learned all this, while I knew nothing about the animal. I'll tell you.

Bunks went into the pantry one afternoon to get a cruller, and, having permission to get it, of course he could stay in there as long as he pleased, and didn't have to hurry out, as was the case when he was in there to "swipe" a cruller. He stood there slowly eating the largest one he could find, when his eye fell on a peculiar mark on the wall beneath the shelf. Having never noticed this mark before, he examined it and found that a piece of muslin had been pasted over the wall.

### In the Enchanted Garden

He pulled at the muslin, and, to his surprise, it came off in his hand, and he discovered a small door in the wall. It had a keyhole, and he knew that it must lead into the yard, but it puzzled him to account for this secrecy. Why should anybody wish to hide this little door in the wall? He looked about, and, high up close to the side of the pantry door, he saw a small key. It took him two seconds to climb up and another to get down and try the key in the keyhole. It fitted and he turned it easily. The door opened, and the sunlight poured into the pantry. Bunks stepped out into the garden, but when he got outside he found, to his amazement, that he was not in his own garden at all, but in some strange place, where there grew all sorts of queer plants and trees. A broad path led away from the little door toward the end of the garden, but, strange to say, he could not see more than a few yards before him. A bright, shining mist hid everything beyond the bushes, but he resolved to see what it hid, and started down the path. As he moved he heard a voice say: "Be careful, my son, for danger lies that way."

Looking around, he saw a tiny elf figure clad in brown leather sitting under a broad-topped stool like an umbrella. Bunks had never seen an elf, but he knew that this was one, of course, and he stopped, saying:

"What can happen to me in our back yard, I'd like to know?"

"This is not your back yard. This is the Enchanted Garden, and mortal foot has not been set in it since your lamented grandmother died eighty years ago. She it was who planted those clam plants, the mulligan bushes, the shoe-string vines and the shirt button shrubs that you see yon."

"Well do I remember the dear woman as she pottered around, chasing snails and toads out of the garden and trimming the hairy verbenas with her scissors. Somewhere out there roams the terrible Hierophant, red-eyed and ferocious, that eats boys. I warn you to beware!"

Bunks was frightened. "I'll look out for him," said he, "and I'll run like all git out if I see him. What does he look like?"

"Pea-green is he, and shining like an asterisk," said the elf, "with a frill of long, wriggling, snaky, wormy feelers all around his neck that make you shiver to see. Six legs has he got, each one longer than the other, and—oh, me! oh, my! how he can run when he's hungry! Nearly had me twice."

All about him Bunks saw that the grass was torn up and the ground appeared freshly disturbed, and he asked the elf if that was the Hierophant's track.

"It is that," replied the elf. "His toes tear up the soil terribly. But I can't stay here talking to you, for it is time for me to go and polish the ancient sun dial over there. I wish you'd remember, however, that I warned you in time. That is, I think it's

time, but I can't tell until I see the sun dial. Farewell."

He went away so quickly that Bunks couldn't see him go, and then the boy went down the path. On both sides grew tall bushes bearing all manner of strange things, napkins, collar buttons, penholders, sealing wax, coffee cups, candlesticks, thimbles, and, in fact, everything one could think of.

"Gee!" said Bunks. "Look like Christmas trees! I'll pick a lot of these things when I come back."

Suddenly he was startled by loud barks all about him, but in an instant he saw that he was passing a group of dogwood trees, which were doing the barking. Although he knew it not, they were warning him of peril, for at the end of the path he came to a stretch of green grass dotted with four-o'clocks, and, as it happened at that moment to be that time exactly, all these flowers struck the hour on tiny bells. As there was no path, he stepped upon the grass, and instantly he became so small that the blades reached above his head. He was no larger than the elf who had warned him of danger, but when he realized what had happened, he sprang back upon the path, hoping to be restored to his former size. No change occurred, but the dwarf appeared at his side and said:

"Now you've gone and done it. You will have to remain a small, unimportant object until night comes, and then, when you step on this path again, you'll grow big at once. There's only one way to cross that grass plot, and that's on stilts."

"What's on the other side?" asked Bunks, his curiosity much excited.

"The Kingdom of King Peter, the riddle-master. He reigns there in wondrous style, but few of his subjects remain with him, for he has driven them all away with his terribly hard riddles."

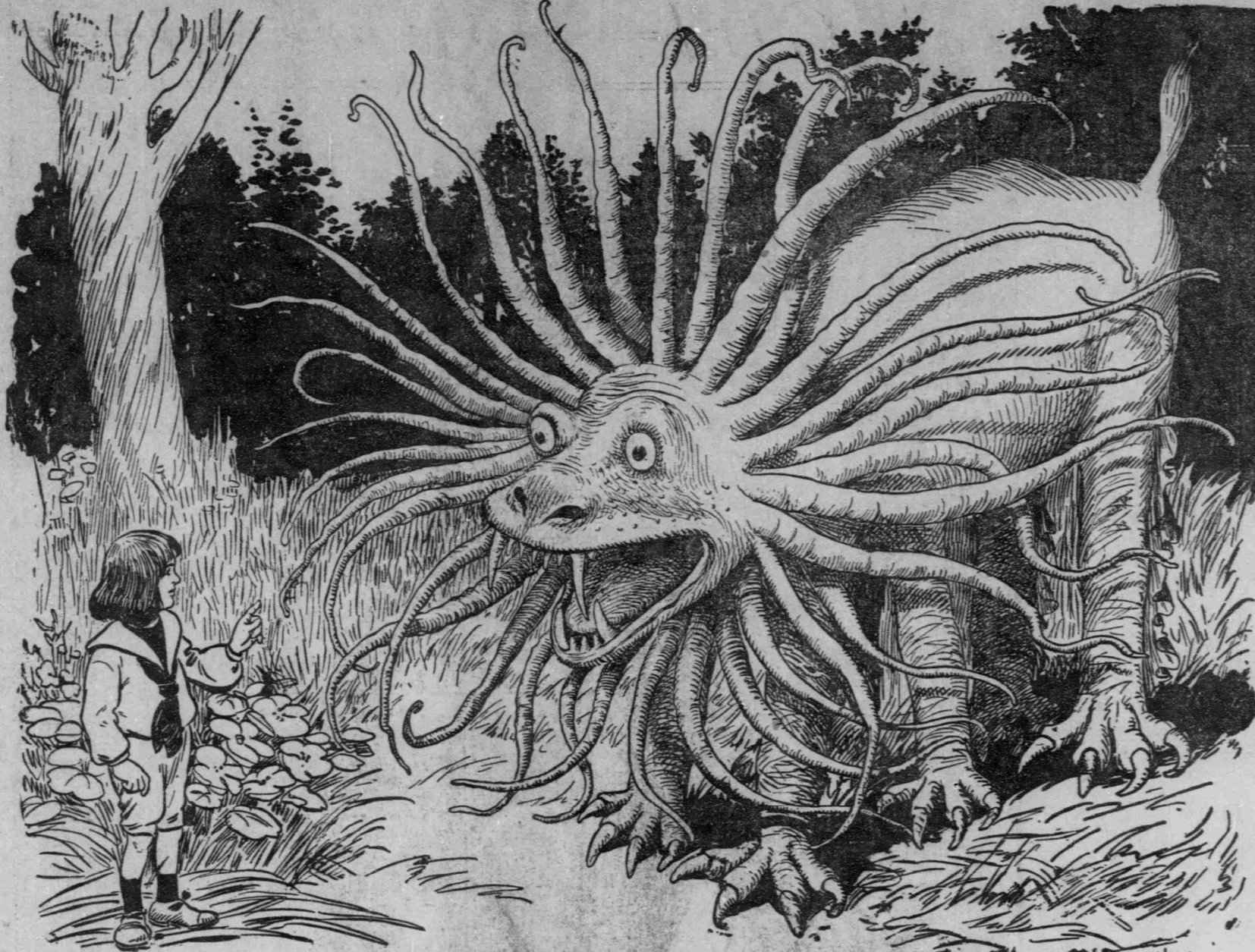
**A King on a Rocking Throne**

"I'll go and call on King Peter," said Bunks. "It won't be long before dark now, and I'll have some fun." He strode across the grass, and a few steps brought him to a miniature kingdom, with so many palaces of gold, ivory, crystal and silver set among clumps of picturesque foliage that it seemed like a fairyland. Immediately before him the grandest palace of all stood with wide-open doors, and at the top of a long flight of steps sat King Peter on a rocking chair throne trying on some new crowns to pass the time away. No courtiers or attendants were visible. The King seemed deserted by all, and, indeed, he was vastly pleased to see Bunks walking up the steps. He sprang out of his rocking throne and smilingly greeted the boy, and as he did so his crown fell off and rolled down the steps to Bunks' feet. The dwarf handed it back to the King, who laughed and said:

"I shall have to have weather strips put inside my crowns, for since my hair came out they will not stay on."

"What made you so bald?" asked Bunks, who did not know you must say "Your Majesty" to a monarch.

"Making riddles," replied King Peter, "and I have made some tough ones, let me tell you. How



THE HIEROPHANT WAS PETRIFYING

about this?" he added: "When is a door not a door?"

Bunks almost fell down the steps, but managed to gasp: "When it's ajar."

The King was very much surprised. "Why," said he, "you are the very first one who ever guessed that," looking at Bunks in wonder.

"I am pretty good at riddles," said Bunks, trying hard not to laugh.

"I'll give you another one," said the King. "Why does a chicken cross the road?"

Bunks pretended to ponder for a few moments, and then replied: "To get to the other side."

"You are a Jim Dandy!" said the King. "Come and have dinner with me. I cannot give you any riddles during the meal, because the constitution prohibits it; but you may think over this cracker-jack while we are eating:

**A Riddle for the King**

"Why does a miller wear a white hat?"

"All right," said Bunks. "I'll think it over, and to give you something to occupy your mind, I'll ask you one myself. Here it is: Why is a frog when it spins?"

"Why is a frog when it spins?" cried the King.

"That is it," said Bunks, as he went up the steps. During the meal the King was silent for a long time, trying to make sense of Bunks' riddle, but as the constitution prevented all reference to riddles at the royal table, he could not speak of what was on his mind. When both had satisfied their hunger Bunks inquired of King Peter whether the Hierophant ever gave him any trouble.

"Trouble!" cried the King. "He is a national catastrophe! He has eaten half of my people, both old and young, and now that human beings are failing him, he is devouring houses, trees, bridges and everything he can find in the land. I have promised to give my daughter and the great two-ounce diamond to the man who can drive him out of my kingdom, but he has devoured all of them with every evidence of great satisfaction and appreciation. I can't keep on feeding him with young men, you know, so I must let him continue to ravage and destroy."

"There ought to be some way to catch him, it seems to me," said Bunks, thoughtfully. "What do you think?"

"Remember, you will have my daughter and the biggest diamond ever seen if you can rid us of this nuisance."

"I always lie down after eating," said the King, when they rose from the table and went to the marble porch. "I find that it clears my mind and polishes up my gems of thought. I fear, however, that I'll not sleep, for your riddle is causing me much difficulty. If I could only reconcile that spinning proposition with the well-known motion of the common frog, I might perhaps see the thing clearer; but I can't make sense of it. Are you sure you have repeated it correctly? The grammar seems somewhat twisted."

"That's the way it's always given," replied Bunks.

"It sounds idiotic," sighed King Peter. "But I s'pose it is all right, for, after all, there's no rule in riddle-wroughting. Write makes right with the riddle-wright you know. Now I will retire for a few spaces." He entered the palace and disappeared in his own room. Bunks went down the steps and strolled into the royal garden, where he found even more wonderful plants than before.

He passed through a garden of glass, where every plant and flower was made of vari-colored crystal, but it had an extremely artificial appearance and was not pleasing at all. Then he came to an atlas garden, which was a complete map of the whole world, with each country in different colored flowers and the oceans real water. Not caring much for geography, Bunks didn't spend much time studying this wonder, and soon passed on to a very interesting place, where nothing but animal flowers grew. Live foxgloves, real tiger lilies, harebells, dogtooth violets and dogwoods, dandelions roaring loudly, catkins meowing and purring, pig nuts grunting in the branches, snake-root squirming in the dust, pussy willows, ox-eye daisies blinking solemnly from the grass, cowslips slithering and sliding all about, wolfbane howling dolefully in the shadows, claphams' ears waving slowly, larkspurs caroling overhead, polygalas

calling for crackers, and a lot more, the names of which he did not know.

It was a most astonishing display, and he stood there for a long time watching these animal plants, which fortunately were all fastened to the ground by stout stems, or else it would have been dangerous to have been loitering in the vicinity, I assure you. Suddenly it occurred to Bunks that it was almost evening, and he hurried back to the palace. Meeting King Peter at the foot of the steps, he said:

"I think I'd better be hastening home, for I am afraid something might happen to me here after dark."

"Can you come to-morrow?" asked the King. "I think I may be able to make head or tail of your riddle after I've slept over it. I can't answer it today, I'm certain."

"All right. I'll come to-morrow," said Bunks. "I hope the Hierophant will not annoy you to-night; and meanwhile I'll try to discover some way to trap him."

Bunks hurried back to the path, finding it without difficulty, and he crept softly through the little door into the pantry, and so to his own room. He lay awake for an hour thinking how he might capture the animal that was devastating King Peter's land, but fell asleep before he had arrived at a solution of the problem; and the King, poor fellow, never slept at all, worrying about a "frog that spins."

In the morning Bunks went to the pantry early, so as to have a long day in the Magical Gardens, and, hurrying across the enchanted grass, became small, as before, in a moment. He found the little King sitting on the steps holding a crown in his hand.

**One Crown is Enough**

"I've picked out one of my spare crowns for you to wear to-day," said he.

"One's enough for me," said Bunks.

"What do you mean?" asked King Peter.

"I've a crown already," replied Bunks. "The crown of my head. See?"

"Why, there's a chance for a riddle in that!" cried the King. "I'll ponder over it. Excuse me while I go to my pondering room a while." He hurried away without ceremony. Bunks sat down on the steps and waited. A moment later a tall and very handsome Princess came to him and said:

"I suppose you are the nobleman who thinks of conquering the Hierophant and marrying me. I want to tell you that you may regret it."

"I never thought much about the marrying part of it at all," replied the boy. "I think you are much too old for me. Haven't you a little sister?"

"I had one, but the Hierophant ate her up. It was one night when she had a birthday party, and he ate up all her little guests as well."

"I had better be about destroying him, I think," said Bunks. "And as for the marrying part of the business, that can wait for fifteen or twenty years."

Now, just as soon as the Princess discovered that he didn't want to marry her she began to want him

## A Country Where Plants and Flowers Do What Their Names Imply

for her husband, and so she was quite anxious that he should destroy the dreaded Hierophant. She told him that the animal had been seen that morning in a little village near by, and that he had devoured several huts with their occupants, and was said to be approaching the palace slowly. "We must be quick," she added, "if we would prevent his eating the palace itself."

Bunks walked around the beautiful palace, and in the rear came to a great pile of white powder heaped up almost as high as the second-story windows.

"What's that?" he asked.

"That's plaster of Paris," she replied. "It was bought by father because he had an idea he could make a new riddle with it. He thought of calling it court plaster of Paris, since it came to his court, but he never did anything with it. I wish the Hierophant would eat it up, and I suppose he will if he gets here."

"He will indeed!" shouted Bunks, as a great idea flashed into his mind. "I have him now!" He called the King, and when he came he asked him to send some laborers to shovel all the plaster of Paris into the great fountain in the centre of the courtyard. This was done at once, but Bunks would not reveal his purpose to the King. He stirred the plaster as fast as they shoveled it into the fountain, adding more water from time to time to keep it soft and mushy, and all the morning he remained there stirring constantly and making the laborers do the same. In the late afternoon they heard cries of dismay, and soon people came in great fear, crying that the Hierophant was approaching. Everybody ran into cellars and holes to hide, and when Bunks saw the awful thing in the distance, a shiny creature with a great frill around its neck and its body of a carmine color, he was also frightened, and he hid in a cranny among some flower-covered rocks.

**Destroyed the Animal**

The Hierophant came purring loudly, swiftly snipping off trees and picking up fences, statues, garden-tools, clothes-poles, wheelbarrows, ash-cans, shovels, bicycles and everything else that was handy, and soon he reached the fountain filled with the mushy white plaster of Paris. He was tempted at once by its creamy whiteness and instantly began to gobble it up. He made a most disgusting noise as he did so, just like some boys when they eat soup. In about two minutes he had taken in all that enormous mass of wet plaster, for he had legs that were hollow and could hold a tremendous lot of food.

When he had emptied the fountain-basin and licked it clean he started to move on, but even in that short time the plaster had begun to "set" and he became so stiff that it was with difficulty that he could take a step. He stood as if wondering what ailed him, and, of course, that was the worst thing he could have done, for the plaster just stiffened until it was like stone, and then he found it impossible to move at all. He rolled his eyes in anguish and fear, but he was now as petrified, for he had a plaster cast inside of him and so he was perfectly harmless.

"You'll trouble people no more," said Bunks, stepping out of his cranny. "I am glad I thought of this scheme, for it saves the expense of having you stuffed." The Hierophant could not even groan, but stood and blinked.

Then Bunks called everybody to come, and the people stood around and jeered at the Hierophant, and this hurt his feelings so much that he died right then and there.

Then the King gave Bunks the big diamond and told his daughter to get ready to be married. Bunks said that the wedding might as well be delayed until the next day, so that he could go home and put on his Sunday suit, and to this the King agreed. So Bunks started for home as nightfall came, the King walking as far as the path with him. As they were about to part King Peter said:

"It's no use! I can't guess the frog riddle, and I'll give it up! Why is a frog when it spins?"

"Because," replied Bunks, "the higher the fewer." Then he stepped on the path and instantly became his full size. The king was so amazed to see him shoot up into a giant that he fell on his back in the grass and stared in fright. Bunks ran to the little door and slipped in. He closed it carefully and then got paste and replaced the muslin.

Then he discovered that in his flight he had lost the diamond, but he did not go back to seek it, for the last thing he had seen was the Princess coming across the grass with a marriage-license in her hand. He never goes to the pantry now for fear of being tempted to re-open the little door; and when I asked him if he ever intended to revisit the King, he said: "Not until I grow to be a man and get over my dislike for 'irls'."

WALT McDOUGALL



THE ELF'S WARNING

KING PETER ON HIS THRONE

